
Unit-12 □ Problems of Young Population

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12.1 Introduction

The youth has always been considered a vital force of any country at any time. It is the youth on whom the prosperity and future of a country largely depend. Each and every country has some history of revolution—either in the economic, social, cultural or political spheres. Under the guidance of some elderly leaders it is the youth who have shared the maximum responsibility of launching and carrying forward such movements. Principally because of their sacrifice these movements become successful. It is because of this hard truth that each country attaches maximum concern to its youth. Stalwards like Swami Vivekananda, Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, and Netaji Subhas Chandra Bose went on telling us throughout their life period that youth, and youth alone can make a country prosperous. Hence, their efforts to create awareness among the youth, to make them courageous and enthusiastic, to make them conscious about their roles and responsibilities were ceaseless.

12.2 Concept

Who the youth are? In other words, what is the criterion of youth? The answer is rather difficult. By youth we generally understand those people of tender age who have courage, vigour, energy and enthusiasm. In the Western countries, 'youth is understood to

be a person belonging to a precise age group with relatively set features'. This is the period the transition from one social world to another. To meet our set objectives sometimes we clearly mention the age to define the youth. But it is difficult to define youth on the basis of either of the above two factors.

However, for defining the youth we can use the standard form of the Government. According to that norm, all belonging to 15-35 years age group are termed as youth. Some changes in the norm have been made in recent past. According to this changed norm youths are divided into two groups. The first group is known as adjacent youth (12-19 years) and the second group is matured youth (20-35 years). But for all practical purposes we in India follow the 15-35 years norm.

The age bracket differs from country to country. For example, it is 15-29 in Sri Lanka, 15-40 in Malaysia, 18-30 in Pakistan, 15-35 in Brunei, 15-30 in Singapore, and 10-24 in Hong Kong. To United Nations people belonging to the age group 15-24 are youth.

12.3 Characteristics

The youth have some definite characteristics. By characteristics we mean the special features, which determine or indicate the differences with others. The characteristics of the youth will differentiate them with the children or elderly persons. The basic characteristics of youth are the followings :

- ❑ They are vibrant
- ❑ They are energetic and enthusiastic
- ❑ They are emotional and very sensitive
- ❑ The people belonging to younger generation are less practical
- ❑ They don't have much patience and hence desire immediate results of any action
- ❑ Generally they prefer 'preyas' than 'shreyas'
- ❑ They are more adventurous; their risk taking ability is more
- ❑ They are ambitious and dreamers
- ❑ Romanticism

12.4 Problems

Like other segments of population, youth are also having lot of problems. Some of them are—

- ❑ The number of the unemployed and underemployed around the world has never

been higher than what it is today. The World Employment Report. 1998-99, states the situation as grim and likely to get grimmer. According to this report some 750-900 million people in the world or 25-30 percent of the population are underemployed. About 60 million people in the 15-24 age group are actively seeking employment. So, unemployment or underemployment is a significant problem of youth particularly in a country like India. In India large scale unemployment problem is a matter of concern.

- ❑ The incidence of under-nutrition among adolescents is high in India with almost one third population living below the poverty line. Malnutrition causes stunting of growth but more particularly is of significance in females because the adolescent period is the period of maximum growth of height and pelvic growth which is critical for the subsequent maternal role.
- ❑ Thousands of young innocent girls disappear every year as fresh recruits to the flesh trades in many developing countries including India. For instance in India, Nepal and Bangladesh out of an estimated 9,00,000 commercial sex workers, 30 percent are children below 18 years. In Western Europe every year 500,000 women and young girls fall victim to immoral traffic and sexual exploitation. Naturally, it is also a very sensitive problem of the younger generation.
- ❑ Young people are not losing interest in sex but in marriage. Good number of teenagers spend long hours in the evening peeping at pornographic websites, as the authorities feel helpless to censor the Internet. Cyber Cafes and night clubs are becoming increasingly popular among the young people all over the world.
- ❑ Substance abuse studies around the world show that young people are the most affected category. Proportion of young people in India between age group 18-29 who have ever used drugs is about 22 per cent. This rate is extremely high in some of the states.
- ❑ Throughout the world accidents account for half of the deaths of people aged 10-24 years. Road accidents and drowning are a major factor of premature death among the young people. In India, Thailand, Uganda and Zimbabwe every day about 10,000 young people are facing death of HIV/AIDS from the year 2001 onwards.
- ❑ The long years of role moratorium caused by the pressure of studies and delaying a socially approved sex life, have left young people groping for directions. Globally over 55,000 abortions are performed daily and 95 percent of these are unsafe. Majorities of those affected are the young women. Pre-manital sex, unmarried motherhood, rape cases also encompass mostly the younger generation.
- ❑ Lack of cognitive flexibility and absence of intimate relationships with parents, relatives, friends and others are leading large number of young people to commit suicide. A recent study by Department of Psychology, Punjab University, revealed that 22 out of every 100 girls and 18 out of every 100 boys have considered

committing suicide. Dissatisfaction with the present and hopelessness about the future were also found to be another major cause for suicidal tendency. Another study published in an international journal—'Psychological Studies' points out that in Chandigarh (India) urban employed women in the age group 30-35 display a higher rate of suicidal idea. According to a National Crime Records Bureau (India) report (1996) of the total suicide victims (88,241) around 38 percent were youths in the age group of 15-29 and 33 percent were middle-aged persons. Between 1986 and 1996, the rate of suicide has risen by 62.34 percent, a sure sign of more and more young people becoming depressed and distressed.

Besides the above-mentioned major problems, youth suffer from some other problems such as—

- ❑ Inadequate arrangements for education, technical education and training
- ❑ Lack of counselling and guidance
- ❑ Identity crisis
- ❑ Conflict with parental authority
- ❑ Marriage and responsibility of parenthood at the stage when they are not in a position to take care of them. This is particularly true in rural areas.
- ❑ Utilized by politicians and vested interest groups for their own purpose
- ❑ Getting involved in unsocial and antisocial activities of various kinds
- ❑ General apathy, frustration and depression
- ❑ Poor provision of sports, games and recreational activities
- ❑ Suffer from stress and strain

Due to complex and unkind society most of the young men and women are suffering from some kind of problems mentioned above. The societal environment is not helping them to grow properly, enjoy their life and use their full potentiality for their personal development, development of their family and country.

12.5 Youth Agitation, Movement and Youth Leadership

Before and after the independence, the youth have come forward on different issues either to make protest or put demands. They played a vital role during the freedom movement. During national calamities also they played important role. As was seen in the recent, past, the youth have launched many movements exclusively for the interest of the youth themselves. During the last few decades attitudinal changes are quite visible. The youth have in increasing number started to be organized in the form of student organisation, youth organisation, mahila mandals, etc. They are playing the role of promoters of organized,

continuous, constructive and cooperative activities. In fact, youth organisations have now become the mechanism of implementing many development programmes in collaboration with the government or non-government organisations. The literacy movement, social forestry programmes, awareness generation, blood donation, fighting against HIV/AIDS got success because of the involvement of the younger generation. Responding to the emergencies has almost become the responsibility of the youth. So it can be said that they are involved in both—showing agitation and getting involved in constructive movement.

Young people are not only victims of violent, destructive and high-risk behaviour; they are also engaged in constructive work. In India about five million young people are engaged in various types of constructive and development work as volunteers. Millions of young men and women spend prime of their lives in national service in many countries. In 21st century, the energy and dynamism of the youth could be unlocked for social change and reconstruction. Constructive outlets for creative energy have to be provided to utilize the immense potential of the youth.

Since 1985, the International Youth Year, nations have recognized that the imagination, ideals, and energies of younger generation are critical for sustainable development of societies in which they live and grow. Accordingly in 1995, the UN General Assembly has adopted the world programme of action for youth—to strengthen national capacities on youth and increase the quality and quantity of opportunities for youth so that they can fully participate in the development of the society. Subsequently in 1998 youth ministers of the Commonwealth have also adopted a Plan of Action for Youth Empowerment (PAYE). The PAYE declares in 2005 that

“Young people are empowered when they acknowledge that they have to create choices in life, are aware of the implications of those choices, make an informal decision freely, take action based on that decision and accept responsibility for the consequences of that action.” The concerned Governments and the civil society of the countries concerned have to create and support enabling conditions so that full flowering of its growth becomes possible.

12.6 Youth Policy

For bringing tangible change in the status or condition of youth well-planned and realistic policies are necessary. As per Oxford Dictionary ‘Policy’ means the agreed position and/or course of action to be followed by Government or person or party. For our discussion here we would refer to ‘policy’ as a set of guidelines, which determine and underline the way thinking and behaving in a certain social, cultural, economic and political environment. The developed countries have accepted the idea of taking definite responsibility to frame youth policy as well as to initiate necessary steps to promote their overall condition. India also felt it essential to develop a youth policy of its own so that planned and meaningful

actions are taken for their welfare. While drafting the Indian youth policy it was kept in mind that by nature youth have two facets—

- (i) they are energetic, innovative, less selfish, idealistic, enthusiastic and sensitive;
- (ii) they are disobedient, rebellious, confused and destructive.

The following issues have also guided the people responsible for drafting the same in making the policy a reality oriented.

- ❑ Rising religious fundamentalism
- ❑ Rising communalism in different pockets of the country
- ❑ Abject poverty among certain section of population
- ❑ Serious problem of unemployment and underemployment
- ❑ High illiteracy rate in different parts of the country
- ❑ Problem of access to education and training
- ❑ The marginalisation of youth
- ❑ Inequality on the basis of gender, caste, etc
- ❑ Lack of sports & constructive recreational facilities
- ❑ Increase in delinquency and crime rate
- ❑ Threat of liquor and drug addiction
- ❑ Increase in the rate of violence, rape, kidnapping and torture on women
- ❑ Need of technically skilled persons in the country

While framing the policy on youth, efforts were made to respond to these problems. Aim of the policy was to give maximum possible opportunity to the youth for their overall development as well as to create an environment where the youth can substantially contribute to the social and economic development of the country. Many of us have an idea that policy framing and its implementation is the responsibility of the Government. But various others organisations such as families, village council, business chambers, trade unions, NGOs, etc. are also playing a significant role in this field.

These policies whether framed by the Government or any other small or large organisation have definite impact on the life of youth in particular and the community in general. In fact, every part of our lives is positively or negatively affected by policies. Policy affects us as an individual, member of an organisation or community. Social policy of a country has direct effect on youth development because of the fact that basically the young men and women depend on social services available in the country with a view to improving the status of their living condition and to meaningfully participate in activities that affect them.

It is in this context that almost all the countries of the world have gone for designing and implementing youth policy. In May 1995 in a meeting at Trinidad and Tobago the Commonwealth Ministers responsible for Youth Affairs recommended that ‘All member Governments of Commonwealth should have their national youth policies formulated or updated by the year 2000, demonstrating their full commitment to the young people of their country.’ This political commitment is absolutely essential a realistic policy framing and implementation of the same is to be ensured. It will also help to put youth issues on the national agenda.

However, it can be said that having a youth policy in place never ensures that everything will run smoothly for youth of the country from now on. Any policy for youth can only be useful if each country is very clear about what it desires to achieve through it. Therefore, the objectives of the policy should be determined at the very beginning of planning and implementation so that the activities planned and strategies decided for youth welfare are implemented smoothly and effectively.

What about the scope of the youth policy ? Scope refers to the limits of the concerned subject. Here scope means how much or how little we wish to include in the policy about youth and their development. It can obviously differ from country to country.; It can be as wide or as narrow as a country deems it to be. Elements of objective youth policy include the followings:

- ❑ A clear vision for the development of youth
- ❑ A statement of principles and values
- ❑ A framework for future programmes of action
- ❑ A statement showing the relationship between the national goal and youth policy
- ❑ A document that is gender sensitive
- ❑ A holistic response to the problems and prospects of the youth
- ❑ A document having relevance to all the players concerned.
- ❑ A definite instrument to promote the profile of younger generation.

A few things should be kept in mind while framing policy by any agency—big or small—for youth development.

- ❑ It must take care of achieving both qualitative and quantitative targets.
- ❑ It should be demonstrated by objective that is SMART (specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic and Time-bound).
- ❑ It should be prepared based on the consultation with youth and other sections of population of the community.
- ❑ It should provide opportunity of conducting critical and objective review.
- ❑ It must clearly spell out the broad parameters of work and general outline of action.
- ❑ It should contain definite policy for specific group of youth.

12.7 The IYY

Giving recognition to the importance of youth and the contributions made by the youth throughout the world, the General Assembly of the United Nations designated 1985 as the INTERNATIONAL YEAR OF THE YOUTH in its 34th session in December 1979. The theme for the observance was defined as 'Participation, Development and Peace'.

In the developing countries like ours the youth groups are significant. From the point of view of development policy, people of this age group are considered to be the most potential in these countries because of their willingness to learn and readiness to accept risks. These characteristics make it possible for the youth to play the important role in the process of social change and the development of the society. Hence our development, policy should be to utilise the existing youth organisations/institutions. These organisations can help in the implementation of programmes initiated both by government and non-government agencies. Even they can take up their own programme by mobilising the resources within the community. It is in this context that the government has laid high priority on local institutions for undertaking various projects throughout the country. Realising the fact that programmes alone will not do, efforts are now there to involve the community (especially the youth) in the process of development. Sustained efforts and devoted work are required to bring them on a platform of constructive activities. It is only through the revitalisation of the country's youth power that the development of the nation as a whole should be possible.

Participation of the youth in the development programme meant for themselves as well as for the community as a whole. Success of any programme will mainly depend on the level of participation of the youth in particular and the community in general. But generally we find that the level of such participation is not encouraging in many cases. Absence of such participation is due to lack of initiative, determination and commitment. Lack of people's participation (specially of youth) is the main factor resulting in the lopsided development particularly of the rural areas. It is our common belief that in the areas where illiteracy is more, level of participation in those areas is less. Many may have experienced the opposite ones. However, the experience says that even if it is an illiterate community, active participation is possible if they are properly and the development leaders keep faith in their capability and commitment.

Peace should be maintained for our prosperity and even for our existence. But in general, it is felt that peace has gone in pieces throughout the country. Prophets of peace like Mahatma Gandhi did their best to maintain peace at the cost of anything. People in general still believe that where there is peace, there is prosperity. They do not believe that destruction is inevitable like death. In a man we perhaps try to find out a creator. Different opinions, however, are obvious. Many of us may think that peace does not help a country to be prosperous. Rather it makes people lazy and inactive. On the other hand a challenging

situation creates wonders and it awakens the sleeping mankind to face the challenge and make sacrifice.

The three items of IYY are correlated to each other because for maintaining peace and materialising development we basically need the participation of the youth. As one of the constituent countries of the Commonwealth, India also observed the IYY in the year 1985.

IYY programme is embodied with some objectives, which are—

- (i) To make people conscious about the position of youth—the constraints and potentialities.
- (ii) To make youth conscious about themselves.
- (iii) To make the government departments and voluntary organisations adequately aware about their role in youth welfare.
- (iv) To initiate some meaningful programmes for youth welfare.
- (v) To think afresh about the role of youth in national development.

12.8 References

1. Youth Welfare in India—L J Kudchedkar
2. Encyclopaedia of Social Work in India, Vol. II—Social Welfare Department, Government of India.
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4. Different booklets published by Dept. of Youth Affairs & Sports, Govt. of India.

12.9 Exercises

1. What do you mean by youth? What are the basic characteristics of youth?
2. The younger generation of today has been confronting various problems. What are those?
3. Write an essay on IYY giving thereby justification of observing it.
4. What is agitation? What kind of youth agitation took place in India? Why?

